



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
Nancy Kushins, Executive Director**

**SB 533 An Act Concerning Notification of the Release of a Registered Sex Offender
into the Community**

**SB 1110 An Act Concerning Sexual Activity Between School Workers and Students
and Including School Superintendents as Mandated Reporters**

HB 6384 An Act Concerning the Registration of Sexual Offenders

**HB 6645 An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Placed or Treated Under
the Direction of the Commissioner of Developmental Services**

**HB 6664 An Act Concerning Revisions to Various Statutes Concerning the Criminal
Justice System**

**HB 6669 An Act Concerning Sexual Offender Registration and Notification
Requirements**

**HB 6670 An Act Concerning the Rights of Crime Victims and the Duties of the
Office of the Victim Advocate**

**HB 6671 An Act Concerning the Forfeiture of Money and Property Related to Child
Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking**

**Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, March 16, 2009**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Nancy Kushins and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual

violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services.

During fiscal year 2007-2008 CONNSACS and its nine community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 6,024 sexual assault victims and their families.

CONNSACS is opposed to SB 533 An Act Concerning Notification of the Release of a Registered Sex Offender into the Community.

Contrary to the popular myth of "stranger danger," children are far more at risk of sexual abuse from adults they know. Research shows that the vast majority of sex offenders know their victims, yet notification measures are generally designed to address situations in which the sex offender is presumed to be a stranger to the victim. Our nine member rape crisis centers reported that last year in Connecticut, 93% of victims age 17 and under knew their perpetrator.

This bill does not make distinctions among the different crimes committed by sex offenders, nor does it consider the level of risk involved when classifying sex offenders. Not all sex offenders pose the same risk of re-offense. Not all sex offenders are pedophiles or child molesters.

It is important to know that over-inclusive public notification can actually be harmful to public safety by diluting the ability to identify the most dangerous offenders and by disrupting the stability of low-risk offenders in ways that may increase their risk of re-offense. Therefore, CONNSACS believes that internet disclosure and community notification should be limited to those offenders who pose the highest risk of re-offense.

In addition, it is CONNSACS' position that internet disclosure and community notification should be limited to those offenders whose public disclosure will not immediately or implicitly identify the victim. Without such limitations, victims who are related to the offender may be deterred from reporting their crimes.

In order for communities to most effectively protect their citizens from the danger of sexual assault, comprehensive sex offender management policies must include community education. This education should consist of:

- Information regarding sexual assault (myths and facts, incidence and prevalence data, victim information)
- Information regarding sex offenders and sex offending behavior
- Information regarding prevention and risk reduction measures, including the strengths and limitations of victim and community measures
- Information regarding resources for victims, offenders, and families

CONNSACS supports HB 1110 An Act Concerning Sexual Activity Between School Workers and Students and Including School Superintendents as Mandated Reporters. As a strong supporter of Public Act No. 02-106, or the "Coaches Bill," we

fully support legislation that prohibits persons in positions of authority or influence from taking advantage of their role to victimize children.

With respect to **HB 6384, An Act Concerning the Registration of Sexual Offenders**, we appreciate the Governor's ongoing commitment to community and victim safety. The majority of the bill is focused on bringing the state into compliance with the Adam Walsh Act. We are pleased to see the establishment of a Sex Offender Registry Policy Advisory Committee, consisting of the same members who served on the Risk Assessment Board. Having served on this earlier iteration of the Committee, we look forward to continuing to provide input as a victim advocacy organization that also has experience working with sex offenders.

We fully support **HB 6645 An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Placed or Treated Under the Direction of the Commissioner of Developmental Services**, which expands the sex crimes statutes to include sexual assaults committed on persons placed or treated under the direction of the Commissioner of Developmental Services. Persons with developmental disabilities are at high risk for sexual abuse. They are a vulnerable population upon which sex offenders often prey. 16.5% of the clients we served during the last fiscal year were persons with disabilities including developmental disabilities. Connecticut must ensure that persons who must depend on others for their care are free from sexual abuse, coercion and exploitation. This bill helps to hold accountable those who would harm vulnerable persons in their care.

In **HB 6664 An Act Concerning Revisions to Various Statutes Concerning the Criminal Justice System**, we appreciate the provision in Section 15, new paragraph (b), which allows a child to have an adult with whom he or she is comfortable in the courtroom while the child testifies. The process of testifying in a criminal proceeding is often intimidating for a child victim. This allowance for an adult known to the child to be in the courtroom, even when that adult is a witness, makes a daunting situation a bit less frightening, and in turn makes the child more helpful to the case and causes him or her less trauma.

CONNSACS supports **HB 6669 An Act Concerning Sexual Offender Registration and Notification Requirements**. CONNSACS sees the merits of the Risk Assessment Board to which the bill refers, and we support the intent of this bill because of its emphasis on risk assessment as opposed to exclusive focus on the particular offense committed. According to recent research conducted by the Center for Sex Offender Management, using crime of conviction as the primary method of determining offender risk of recidivism is far less reliable than the use of actuarial tools. We are pleased to see the inclusion of risk assessment here.

With respect to **HB 6670 An Act Concerning the Rights of Crime Victims and the Duties of the Office of the Victim Advocate**, as one of the victim services groups involved in the creation of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA), CONNSACS remains proud of the establishment of this office as an independent state agency whose purpose is to protect and promote the rights of crime victims in Connecticut.

CONNSACS serves as an active member of the Office of the Victim Advocate Advisory Council. We have a question with regard to Section 6(d). If payment of this new fee has first priority over other fees and fines, what will be the impact on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund and the Sexual Assault Victims Account? Finally, we support Section 8, which would expedite criminal proceedings in cases involving a minor. We appreciate this effort to avoid re-victimization of child victims whose cases are prolonged due to lengthy proceedings, including continuances.

We support **HB 6671 An Act Concerning the Forfeiture of Money and Property Related to Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking**. We strongly applaud this legislation and the commitment to funding opportunities for enhancing the knowledge of first responders who work with victims of sexual assault. CONNSACS has a long history of providing sexual assault programming to law enforcement through the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (P.O.S.T.) This bill recognizes the importance of the skills possessed by police who are first on the scene of a sexual assault. We look forward to continuing our partnership with P.O.S.T.

Thank you for your consideration.